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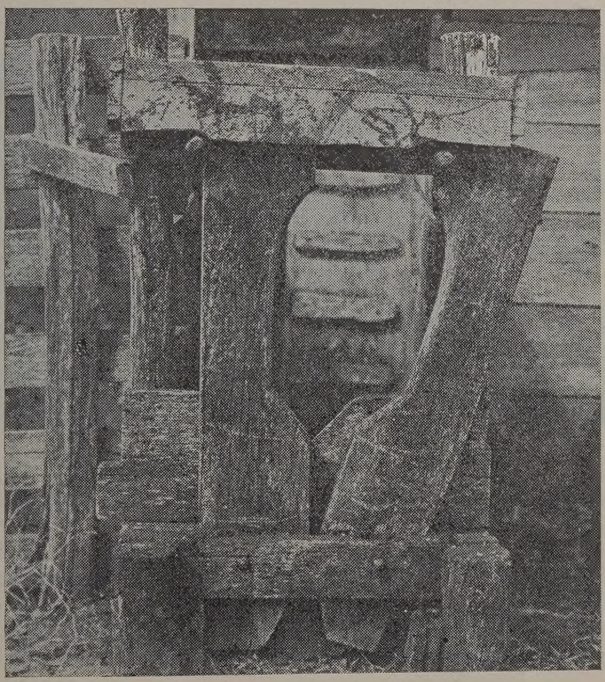
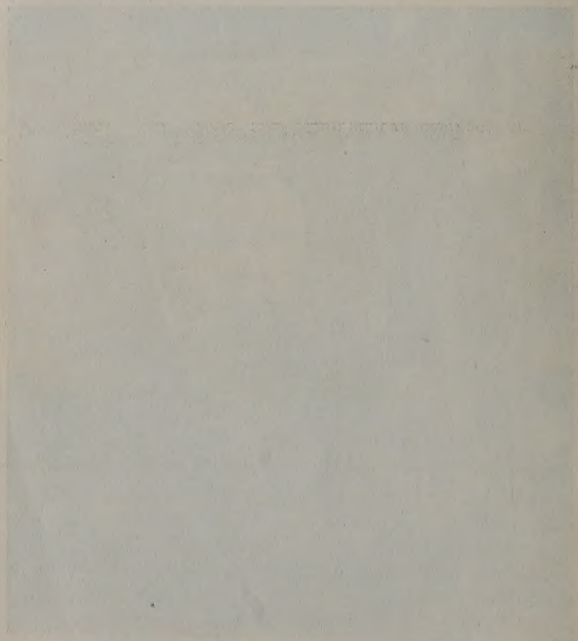
DEHORNING CATTLE



1. Dehorning chute.

Raleigh and West Raleigh, North Carolina



DEHORNING CATTLE

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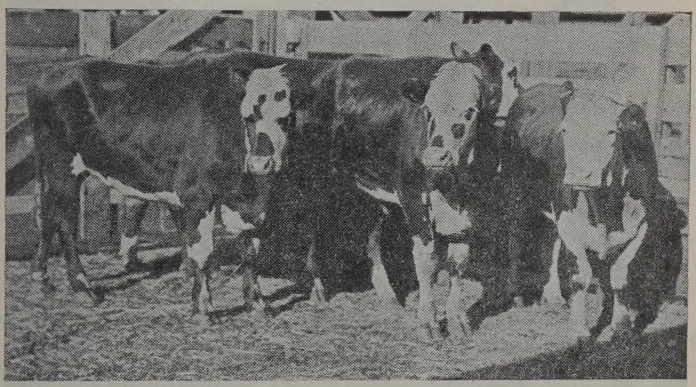
PURPOSES AND METHODS OF DEHORNING CATTLE.

The introduction of polled cattle on the farms, and the increase in the feeding of beef cattle, has brought about a desire among farmers to either breed polled cattle or to learn some satisfactory way of dehorning them, especially for feed-lot purposes. In the earlier stages of agricultural development, where cattle ran wild, horns were needed for protective purposes, but under domestication they are not only useless, but dangerous and oftentimes damage the hide and carcass of other animals.



2. The best market steers are always dehorned.

The breeders of pure-bred cattle do not often dehorn their animals, because the natural horned character gives them style in the show yard which they would not otherwise have in the same degree. Almost without exception, however, farmers who feed or finish beef cattle are desirous of having either naturally polled animals or cattle from which the horns have been removed. This naturally brings up the problem concerning the best methods to use in preventing or removing horn growth.

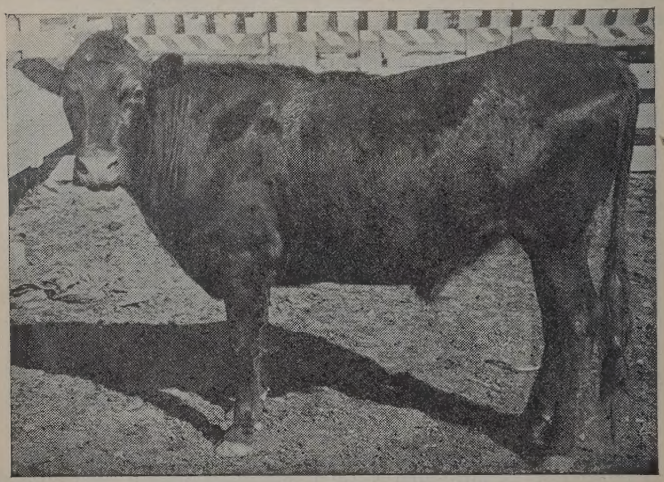
WHY CATTLE ARE DEHORNED.

The chief reasons for dehorning cattle are to make them more tractable and for the purpose of making animals less dangerous which have

the inclination to be vicious. Dairy bulls come under this latter class most largely. However, under certain other instances, dairy cows are often dehorned for the same reason. One of the chief reasons for dehorning cattle, generally speaking, is to prevent injury and adapt beef cattle for feed-lot purposes. Horned cattle in the feed lot take up much more space than otherwise, and in many instances the stronger animals fight the weaker ones away from the troughs.

BREEDS WHICH ARE NATURALLY POLLED.

The breeds of beef cattle which are naturally polled include the Aberdeen Angus, the Polled Durham, an offspring of the Shorthorn, which is naturally a horned breed; the Polled Hereford, an offspring of the Hereford, also a naturally horned breed; and among the dairy breeds the Polled Jersey, an offspring from the Jersey breed, which is a naturally horned breed.



3. A steer showing the results of proper dehorning.

By crossing these polled breeds on naturally horned cattle, a large percentage of the offspring is naturally polled, this system of dehorning being use in a great many instances. This practice, if properly carried on, is by all means the most humane method of removing the horns, but unfortunately it is not always within the scope or financial field of the farmer to use such a method. At least knowledge concerning this method of dehorning is not sufficiently widespread to enable farmers to use the method scientifically.

METHODS OF ARTIFICIAL DEHORNING.

Preventive or Caustic Method Applicable for Undeveloped Horns. The Advantages of this method are second only to the method of "breeding" the horns off. These are as follows:

The animal is easily controlled, the least skill of the operator is required, and the shock to the animal is least. The pain produced is limited, the hemorrhage of the other methods is entirely avoided, and the chances of infection of the wound are practically eliminated. The

4. A steer showing the results of improper dehorning.

resulting wound is very small, and the chances of success in securing a perfect muley head are good. The equipment and cost is very small, one season of the year is as good as another, and there is no after-care necessary.

Age.—In order to use this method, it must be done early in life, before the horns have pushed above the skin. It should preferably be done during the first week.

Agents.—Any agent may be used which will destroy the horn core. Caustic agents are usually employed, possessing sufficient irritant properties to destroy the horn core and yet not so active as to destroy tissue unnecessarily. Caustic potash in stick form possesses such properties. It can be secured at most any drug store.

Application.—No special means of restraint is necessary, although the calf must be held still enough to make the application at the proper point.

The hair should be clipped close over the horn core, covering a space the size of a 5 or 10 cent piece. Around this a little vaseline or lard may be smeared to prevent any excess caustic from spreading beyond where wanted.

The caustic potash should be handled in paper, leaving one end exposed. When ready to make the application, the exposed end of the caustic must be moistened in water. It is then applied by pressing firmly against the skin and giving it a rotary motion for a few seconds. Apply to the opposite side, then repeat the process to each side two or three times. The time required depends upon the amount of moisture used and the pressure applied. The whole procedure should not require more than four or five minutes.

Should any of the caustic accidentally get on the operator or in the eyes of the calf, it should be freely washed off at once or neutralized by the use of vinegar or any other very weak acid.

Gouge or Forcep Method Applicable from Birth to Several Months Old.—This method, like the first, has many features to commend it, especially when done very early. It requires the least time of any method and very little equipment. It may be employed any time from birth to several months of age, depending upon the size of the horn, but the earlier the better.

Agents.—A heavy, sharp knife or heavy curved scissors may be used, but it is much preferable to use special instruments designed for this purpose, called "dehorning forceps," or "horn gouge." These can be secured from instrument houses.

Method.—The animal should be restrained by holding in the standing or lying position, or may be placed in a box chute. The instrument and the hair about the base of the small horn or over the horn core should be disinfected.

The instrument should be so placed as to cut through the skin and under the base of the horn core, assuring the complete removal of it. A little sterile cotton or tarred cotton may be temporarily laid or tied over the bleeding surface. Any packing should be removed in twenty-four hours to provide free drainage of the wound.

Dehorning Shears or Saw Method Applicable for Removing Horns too Large for the Dehorning Forceps.—This method has all of the disadvantages enumerated as advantages under the first and second methods. It is to be recommended only when one of the other two has not been employed or, if used, failed to completely remove the horn core which resulted in the production of a stubby horn or scur.

Season.—Since the removal of an adult horn leaves a large wound, subject to attack by flies and infection, the flyless or cooler seasons of the year are to be preferred; though, as with other operations, it may be performed at any season.

Agents.—There are two kinds of instruments that may be used in this method of dehorning. The one much to be preferred is the dehorning shears or clippers. These consist of heavy, sharp blades,

cutting from all sides of the horn toward the center, or a curved blade like a pruning hook. Attached to the blades are heavy handles for closing the blades about the horn.

The other instrument used is a saw. Several forms of saws may be used, but a special dehorning saw or a meat saw is most desirable. The saw has the advantage of being less expensive than the shears, and by tearing its way through, more or less, the hemorrhage is usually not so great as with shears. However, from the humane standpoint, the use of the dehorning shears, in being much less painful and more rapidly done than with the saw, are much to be preferred.

Method.—The animal may be confined in several ways. If a number of cattle are to be dehorned, it will pay to build a chute with an adjustable head stall at one end. It is well to disinfect the instrument and the skin about the base of the horn.

The instrument should then be placed so as to remove a full half-inch of skin all around the base of the horn. This assures getting below the horn core and prevents ugly, deformed horns or scurs from forming later. Both sides should be cut alike, so as to make the head appear symmetrical.

Considerable bleeding frequently follows dehorning, but it is seldom serious, although animals sometimes stagger and fall from the loss of blood. The bleeding can be largely controlled as mentioned under the dehorning forcep method. Any packing used should be removed in twenty-four hours. A little tar smeared about the wound will keep away many flies, but as tar is ordinarily applied it carries more infection to the wound than it avoids.

SUMMARY.

The general practice of dehorning has become quite widespread and is valuable for various reasons, as before mentioned. On the range, where large numbers of feeding cattle are produced, they are usually dehorned on the range and practically always after they are purchased for feed-lot purposes. If the cattle are not dehorned until after the feeder receives them, he should allow them to become accustomed to surroundings a few days and then the horns removed. When cattle are so handled, they require much less space, are more tractable, and feed and sell to better advantage.